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ABSTRACT

A study on moral development focused on the status passage from school to work. The paper-and-pencil form of the Moral Judgment Interview (an adaptation of Kohlberg's instrument by Gibbs and Widaman) was administered to young people aged 17-22 who had just finished schools and were starting as apprentices in insurance companies where they were exposed to the special features of the business world with respect to its moral atmosphere and their influence on young apprentices. Two main types of situations were distinguished: market and team. The moral qualifications needed to master these situations differed in terms of Kohlberg's theory. The project studied what was going on in terms of both moral development and reasons for stability or change in apprentices' moral judgment competence. The apprentices were asked to report their perceptions of the intensity of the six dimensions of social interactions. Two dilemmas on social problems in the business context were offered to the apprentices: a market situation and a team situation. Results indicated they judged the two situations differently, tending toward a more strategic (preconventional) view of the team situation and toward a more sociocentric (conventional) view of the market situation--a surprising result that was the opposite of what could have been expected. Kohlberg's hypothesis that an individual firmly established on a given stage would judge all moral conflicts according to the principle of this stage could perhaps not be upheld. (Contains 10 references.) (YLB)

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The Development of Moral Reasoning During Vocational Education

by

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the
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The Development of Moral Reasoning During Vocational Education

Abstract

Entering vocational education can be seen as a 'status passage' from school to work. It is supposed that important life events like this status passage have a crucial and intensive impact on the development of moral judgment competence.

This paper discusses the special features of the world of business with respect to its moral atmosphere and their influence on young apprentices. A distinction is made between two main types of situations, namely market situations and team situations. It is argued that the moral qualifications needed to master these situations are differing in terms of Kohlberg's theory.

Data from a longitudinal study are reported. They show differences in moral judgments of the two types of situations in an unexpected direction. They also contain information on six conditions of moral development. The relation between these conditions and moral judgment competence is analyzed and it is discussed whether the findings are compatible with Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

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The Development of Moral Reasoning During Vocational Education

Introduction

As Piaget (1980) has already stated, moral development is the result of an interaction between the individual on the one side and the environment in which it is embedded on the other. Stagnation may occur (Kohlberg 1976) if a person's developmental resources are exhausted (e.g. if the given level of intelligence functions as a ceiling effect) or if there is a lack of stimulation from the outside world (e.g. if the person's living conditions are stable and free of conflicts). It is supposed that important life events have a crucial and intensive impact on the development of moral judgment competence (Oser/Althof 1992, 72). These „critical incidents" are likely to foster moral development especially if they are initiated by new social contacts when the individual may have to adopt one or more new roles.

Within our western cultures there are some biographical phases, the so-called status passages, which under normal circumstances everybody has to go through. During these phases a person is usually confronted with unknown social conditions forcing him or her to develop or stabilize a new self conception or to find a modified identity. Status passages of this type occur e.g. by entering the kindergarten, the elementary school, a college, a university or a (new) job. While these examples are referring to the life dimension of education, there are, of course, other types of events, formal and informal ones, which may involve chances for the developmental progress of moral judgment competence as well (e.g. starting a new partnership or friendship, entering a (sports) club, but also participating in public debates about moral/ethical problems like war, abortion, death penalty etc.). Obviously, status passages represent times of change and enlargement of the individual's social relations. Therefore, they are of interest for research on moral development.

In our study on moral development we focus on the status passage from school to work. We administered the paper and pencil form of the MJI (Gibbs/Widaman 1982) to young people (17 to 22 years old) who had just finished school (mostly after higher general secondary education) and were then starting a carreer as apprentices in insurance companies. For all of them it was the first time to experience the world of business and the „vicissitudes of life" as - in a certain sense - they have to „stand on their own legs" in this new situation. During this phase the young people get into and experience a lot of new social relations. They have to learn to behave within a formal social hierarchy, and they also have to learn a good deal about business. Within the first months of their vocational life a lot of incidents occur which may be perceived by them - though unconsciously - as morally challenging and which, as a consequence, may make their moral competence move.

In our project we are studying what's going on during this time of status passage not only in terms of moral development but also in terms of what the reasons are for stability or change in our apprentices' moral judgment competence.

The moral ambiguity of business experience

It would be too simple to suppose that all forms of social interactions harbor incentives for a growing moral competence. As mentioned above, some types of social contacts - if not morally neutral - may function as stabilizers for a given level of moral development. If, for example, a person on stage 3 (sensu Kohlberg) is living a „normal" family life and is working in the field of health care, the conditions for moral development may be stable and thus confirm this person in his/her moral thinking. For another person, who has not yet reached stage 3, the same circumstances may stimulate a developmental progress, whereas a third person formerly established on stage 4 may, under these conditions, even show regressive tendencies towards stage 3.

Hence, the way in which given social circumstances influence further developmental steps supposedly depends on the level of moral development already reached.

In the new business world our apprentices are confronted with moral stimuli which are influencing their judgments - as has just been stated - in a different way depending on their competence level at the beginning of their vocational training. But this is not the only reason for the differentiated effect of vocational education on moral thinking. Looking at its moral profile the world of business is not at all homogeneous. From company to company the moral atmosphere may vary namely by trade but in particular according to the individual personalities of instructors and colleagues. Therefore, it is not easy to advance a general hypothesis about the effect of vocational education on a given level of moral competence.

Moreover, within one and the same company the apprentices meet with a lot of varying social constellations which again could produce differential stimulating effects. And, of course, during the apprenticeship the non-vocational relations outside the company will either continue or change. To find out the reasons for change or stability in moral thinking, it is necessary to gain information about the importance the individual assigns to the different sections of his/her social life. In our study we distinguish between three such sections, i.e. family, peers, and company. In this paper I refer only to the company as a field of moral socialization. This is not only for brevity. Our data set as a whole seems to show that there is a context specifity of moral development. This implies that one and the same person may produce judgments on different moral stages depending on the social field or context involved („segmentation of moral judgment"; cf. Beck 1996).

Looking at the company we can distinguish (at least) two basic types of situations. The first one may be designated as „market situation", whereas the second may be called „team situa-

tion". The difference between these two types of situations in terms of moral reasoning is given by the objectives under which the relevant interactions are performed. In market situations the persons involved have to seek for their own profit within the given rules (i.e. laws, decrees etc.). It is their task to try to maximize the benefits for themselves, or for their companies respectively. This requires a moral point of view best described by Kohlberg's stage 2: a strategic orientation under the conditions of fair play and rule obedience. It would nearly always be dysfunctional and wrong in situations of this type to activate moral arguments of stage 3 or higher because the one who does so will be eliminated from the market in the long run (Buchanan 1990; Homann/Pies 1994).

By way of contrast, in team situations the participants have to cooperate to reach an optimal result. They have to persue a common goal (products or services). Everybody involved has to do one's best, has to help others, to care for the partners etc. Acting in this manner needs moral considerations at least on stage 3 (role taking perspective), if not on stage 4 (system perspective, from which the company can be viewed at as a system). Contrary to the market situation an attitude as rival or competitor will normally be dysfunctional in team-type situations because the goal-reaching process would then be suboptimal.

To be a well qualified businessman means therefore - in terms of moral thinking - to be able to adapt to the type of situation whether market oriented or team oriented. Therefore, the different influences which an apprentice undergoes within a company do not only stem from the differences between persons and lines of business. They also have their roots in the different basic functions of economic actions, namely competing or cooperating. In our study we tried to take these circumstances into account by presenting our apprentices two different dilemmas, one in the realm of market actions and one in the realm of within company cooperation.

The conditions of moral development

Coming back from the more typological approach to a micro-perspective on moral development, we can distinguish with Wolfgang Lempert (1993; 1994) six relevant dimensions of social interactions (table 1) as perceived by the individual:

Tab. 1: Conditions for Moral Development

(1) Love, care, recognition from others (abiding recognition; indifference, heatred rejection, depreciation, contempt)
(2) Involvement in social problems (manifest; repressed, transferred)
(3) Types of communication (free, symmetric; standardized, one-way, manipulative)
(4) Participation in decision-making (co-operative; subordination, rivalry, mere talk)
(5) Ascription of responsibility (adequate; overcharging, undercharging)
(6) Scope of action (adequate; overcharging, undercharging)

As Lempert assumes, all six dimensions have to be experienced positively for a long time (at the best for years) if moral progress is to be fostered. So far, we do not know in which way the six dimensions of moral atmosphere interact. It might be that some of them compensate each other (e.g. (4) participation in decision-making and (6) scope of action) or that some are correlated positively (e.g. (5) ascription of responsibility and (6) scope of action). Lempert supposes that at least (1) love, care, and recognition from others is an indispensable condition for moral progress. We expect the same for (2) involvement in social problems: If an individual lives in a

field free of conflict, there is no reason for thinking about social problems and there are neither occasions nor is there any need to seek solutions for situations of competing values.

In our study we asked the apprentices to report their perceptions of the intensity of the six dimensions. In addition, they had to tell us how important they feel every dimension is for themselves. From these data we calculated a score for each individual representing the overall probability of moving on the moral development scale. The score varies from + 1.0 (favorable, stimulating progress) through 0.0 (neutral, stabilizing) to -1.0 (pulling down, stimulating regression).

Again, the constellation of the dimensions of moral atmosphere will influence the moral development of a person depending on the level of moral competence he or she has already attained. For the construction of an aggregate score it was necessary to develop a theoretical idea which dimension has a bearing on which competence level in which way. Therefore, we developed in cooperation with W. Lempert a table of hypotheses which for each moral stage and each dimension contains a qualitative assumption about the direction in which moral development should tend to be driven if both are given in the special combination (cf. table 2).

Tab. 2: Relation between conditions of moral development and moral judgment competence

Condition	Subcondition	Property	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
Love, care, recognition	as person	obtained	→	→	→	→	0	0
		deprived of	+	0	←	0	←	0
	as role occupant	obtained	→	→	+	0	0	0
		deprived of	+	+	←	0	0	0
Involvement in social problems	I/I(nterest)	manifest	→	+	←	0	0	0
	I/V(alue)		→	→	→	+	0	0
	V/V		0	0	→	→	→	+
	I/I(nterest)	repressed	+	+	←	0	0	0
	I/V(alue)		0	→	+	+	←	+
	V/V		0	0	0	→	→	+
Types of communication		free, symmetric	→	→	→	→	→	+
		standardized	+	←	←	←	0	0
Participation in decision-making		co-operative	→	→	→	0	0	0
		subordinated	+	←	←	←	0	0
Ascription of responsibility		adequate	→	→	→	→	→	+
		overcharging	+	0	←	←	←	+
		undercharging	+	+	←	0	0	0
Scope of action		adequate	→	→	→	→	→	+
		overcharging	+	0	←	←	←	+
		undercharging	+	+	←	0	0	0

→ stimulating

← pulling down

\+ stabilizing

0 neutral

Method

Our longitudinal study with apprentices in insurance companies started in the autumn of 1994. As mentioned above, we administered the paper and pencil MJI sensu Gibbs and Widaman (1982) in one year intervals. Two dilemmas on social problems in the business context were offered. As in the Heinz-dilemma the initial situation was altered step by step so that different values stood against each other.

Dilemma I: Market Situation

Knut Weber is an official of an insurance company. He has to come to a decision on the following case: Mr. Danz, an insured person, has died because of a heart attack. Mrs. Danz, his wife, now asks Weber for the payment of the sum insured.

By chance, Weber gets to know that Mr. Danz had already been suffering from a heart condition already before he entered the life insurance contract, which he had not declared in his insurance application. Now, Weber is in doubt whether he should put on record this information (that he had picked up accidentally and in private matters) - which would lead to a refusal of the payment, or whether he should retain the information and sign the payment order.
What should Weber do?

- retain the information and transfer the money?
- pass the information on Danz' dossier and refuse the payment?

(affiliation vs. contract)

Variants on this case:

1. We suppose that Mrs. Danz appears in Weber's office for a confidential talk. Weber finds her a very agreeable person. She tells him that since her husband's decease she had to live in very poor conditions and makes evident that she really needs the money. *(Positive affiliation vs. law/property)*

2. We suppose that Mrs. Danz acts rather condescendingly when talking to Mr. Weber in his office. Finally she tells him that she needs the money and demands him to transfer the amount to her banking account as soon as possible. *(Negative affiliation vs. law/property)*

3. We suppose that Mrs. Danz herself is seriously sick. She has to undergo an operation of the heart that can only be carried out in Australia; neither the operation nor the flight will be paid by her health insurance. *(Life vs. law/property)*

4. We suppose that Mrs. Danz is not sick. She promises Weber to sign herself a life insurance contract if Weber is ready to pay the amount of her husband's life insurance. She tells him that if he refused to pay, she would subscribe to an offer of a rival firm. *(Law vs. property)*

5. We suppose that Weber has paid the sum insured to Mrs. Danz and that Mrs. Danz has signed the new life insurance. Two weeks later, a rival firm offers the same insurance contract to Mrs. Danz, but at much better conditions. Now, she begs Weber to annul the contract and again emphasizes the humble conditions she has to live in. *(Affiliation vs. contract)*

6. We suppose that Weber has paid the sum insured to Mrs. Weber. Unexpectedly, it becomes known in his company that Weber had been in the knowledge of Mr. Danz's disease and that he has retained this knowledge. Now, the personnel manager has to decide on the dismissal of Mr. Weber. Should he approve the dismissal? *(Justice vs. law)*

Dilemma II: Team Situation

Guenter Holm is an employee of an insurance company. One afternoon, he calculates the sales statistics for the past sales period. The commission his superior obtains is based on these statistics. Just before the end of work, the superior, Mr. Olten, asks Holm to come into his office. He tells him that because of the construction of his house he is in financial difficulties. He asks Holm to make an exception and to forge the sales report in order to raise the amount of commission so that Olten could master his financial problems.

Back home, Holm thinks about Olten's request. On the one hand, forging the sales report would be a fraud. On the other hand, he would want to help his superior (Holm himself has already raised a loan to pay off his flat). *(Neutral/positive affiliation vs. property)*

What should Holm do?

- forge the sales report?
- not forge the sales report?

Variants on this case:

1. Suppose that Mr. Holm respects Mr. Olten very much because he is a fair and cooperative superior. On top of this, Holm owes his past pay increase to Mr. Olten's intercession. After all, when he asked Holm to forge the sales report Mr. Olten expressed that he would be very grateful. *(Positive affiliation vs. law/property)*

2. Suppose now the superior were a ruthless, authoritarian and selfish person. (*Negative affiliation vs. law/property)*

3. Now, imagine that it had not been his superior who asked Guenter Holm to forge the sales report, but Mr. Zinn, a younger employee Mr. Holm is in charge of, who has to repay an overdue loan. *(Neutral affiliation vs. law/property)*

4. Suppose now the superior did <u>not</u> ask Mr. Olten to forge the sales report. This situation is rather the following: Holm receives a larger sum (about 20.000 DM) from the head office: an extra pay for 20 insurance agents in external service. Now, Mr. Olten implores Holm urgently to conceal this extra pay from the agents and to let him have the money so that he could master his financial difficulties. *(Positive affiliation vs. property).*

5. Consider the following situation: Mr. Holm himself has lent about 40.000 DM to an acquaintance. By agreement, the borrower hat still got three years to repay the credit. *(Positive affiliation vs. contract).*

6. Now imagine that Mr. Holm accidentally meets his superior's wife, Mrs. Olten. She tells him that the construction of the Olten family's new home means an immense burden for her husband, whose psychical and physic resources are exhausted. Their physician already warned Mr. Olten to be very careful, because any further effort could trigger a letal heart attack. *(Life vs. law/property)*

7. Imagine that after his conversation with Mrs. Olten, Mr. Holm finally forges the sales report. Shortly after, his fraud becomes known. Now, Mr. Holm has to justify his offence to the personnel manager who must decide on his dismissal. *(Justice vs. law)*

After scoring we computed the modal stage as Kohlberg and his co-workers have recommended. To gather data on the moral atmosphere, we administered a questionnaire with open

ended and multiple choice items in order to get information on the individual perception of the six dimensions as well as on their subjective importance.

At the current state of our study (the scoring of the third wave is not yet completed) we can report data from two successive points of measurement.

Results

At present our findings are based on about 30 pairs of data on moral judgment in the „market conflict" (N = 28) and the „team conflict" (N = 33). In some cases we found two modal stages (two neighboring stages with the same amount of scores); for clarity of presentation we took the higher stage in those cases. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show the results.

Tab. 3.1: Stages of Judgment for the Market Dilemma

t_1 \ t_2	I	II	III	IV	tot.
I	-	2	2	-	4
II	1	2	6	-	9
III	2	4	8	1	15
tot.	3	8	16	1	28

Tab. 3.2: Stages of Judgment for the Team Dilemma

t_1 \ t_2	I	II	III	tot.
I	9	4	1	14
II	4	5	3	12
III	2	2	3	7
tot.	15	11	7	33

As can easily be seen, the patterns for the two situations show similarities and differences. Looking at the row and column totals, we first discover that the distributions of cases over the different stages follow opposite ranks. In the market conflict the frequencies increase from stage 1 (lowest rank) to stage 3 (highest rank) in t_1 and t_2 as well whereas in the team conflict the numbers are falling exactly in reverse order, again in t_1 and t_2. Obviously, the apprentices judge the two situations in a different way. They tend towards a more strategic (preconventional) interpretation of the team situation and towards a more sociocentric (conventional) view of the market situation - a surprising result, which is the opposite of what could have been expected under the aspect of social and economic rationality, as outlined above.

Beside this difference between the two dilemmas they coincide in that row totals (t_1) and the column totals (t_2) in both cases are nearly the same. This is a good occasion to show that comparisons of groups can mask a lot of variation. For the market dilemma in t_1 and t_2 only 10 of

the 28 persons used the same judgment principle and for the team dilemma 17 of the 33 persons maintained their moral judgment (cells on the diagonal of the tables).

In the market situation after one year 11 apprentices prefer a higher stage principle as argument for their decisions while 7 of them now use an argument of a lower stage. In the team situation the fluctuation in both directions of the stage sequence is of equal size (8 up and 8 down). But the amount of variation between t_1 and t_2 in this dilemma is not as large as in the market dilemma (here about 1:1 and there about 2:1).

Looking at the intrapersonal judgment relations between the two stories, it can be seen that the arguments used by the apprentices differ in relation to the situation. For an overview table 4 contains the pairwise combination of stages for the two stories in t_1 (rows) and in t_2 (columns).

The bold numbers count the 10 persons whose judgments at both points of measurement were homogeneous or became (more) homogeneous within a year (on the left of the bold line in table 4). 13 persons' judgments were already heterogeneous in t_1 or became (more) heterogeneous during their first year of apprenticeship (on the right side of the bold line in table 4).

Lastly, the data on the developmental conditions are to be reported. For brevity table 5 shows the aggregate scores for t_1 and t_2 as described above and a combined overall score (the average of t_1 and t_2), the latter as a measure for the whole time of investigation. Again, the presentation is restricted to the information about the moral atmosphere in companies.

Tab. 4: Intrapersonal Judgment Relations*

t_1 \ t_2	1/1	2/2	3/3	+/-1	+/-2	tot.
1/1	-	-	-	-	1	1
2/2	-	**2**	**1**	2	2	7
3/3	-	-	**1**	2	1	4
+/-1	-	-		4	1	5
+/-2	-	-	**2**	**4**	-	6
tot.	-	2	4	12	5	23

* The row and column entries read as follows: „1/1" means that in the market and in the team dilemma stage 1 was scored; „2/2" and „3/3" analogous. „+/-1" means that the difference between the two stages used to judge the two stories was one stage (1/2, 2/3, 2/1, 3/2, 3/4); „+/-2" analogous.

Tab. 5: Developmental Character of Moral Atmosphere (Within Company)

Developmental Conditions	t_1	t_2	t_m
supporting	22	17	25
neutral/ stabilizing	9	10	9
hindering/ pulling down	2	3	3
miss.	4	7	-*
tot.	37	37	37

* For cases with only one information (t_1 or t_2) this information is taken as a measure for the whole time span.

For an overview the scores are categorized in three groups as follows: -1. ... -.31 means that the developmental conditions are negative („hindering/pulling down"), -.30 ... +.30 means that the conditions are affirmative („neutral/stabilizing"), and +.31 ... +1.0 means that they are positive („supporting"). It can be seen that the majority of the apprentices experience the company atmosphere as stimulating and that therefore the moral competence of these cases should rise or, at least, stay stable if one takes into account (a) that we do not know how long it takes until a moving-up process can be measured and (b) that we do not know, too, how company experiences interact with experiences in the other sections of life. Table 6 shows some tentative relations between the character of the within company moral atmosphere and the changes in the measured moral competence of our apprentices.

Tab. 6: Moral Atmosphere and Stage Transitions (Market and/or Team Situation)

1 Developmental Condition	2 up (in market and/or team-situation)	3 stable (in both situations)	4 down (in market and/or team-situation)	5 both directions (up and down in market and team-situation)	6 tot.
supporting	13	6	5	1	25
neutral/ stabilizing	2	3	3	1	9
hindering/ pulling down	-	-	3	-	3
tot.	15	9	11	2	37

We asked for all three variants of the average developmental constellation (supporting; neutral/stabilizing; hindering/pulling down) whether they have an impact either on the judgment of the market story or of the team story or of both in the expected direction. The data show that there are at least 19 cases (diagonal) matching the „theoretical" expectation, plus another two (col. 5) where the bi-directional development might be interpreted as still compatible with the

forecast by the development score. 11 cases (6 + 2 + 3; off-diagonal) do not explicitly corroborate the relation supposed but on the other hand they also don't refute it. So, there are (only) 5 cases left which are not compatible with this - admittedly raw - concept of explanation of moral development. Of course, we'll have to carry out more differentiated analyses with these data in which we look separately at the six dimensions of moral development and their effects on the changes of moral thinking.

Discussion

The longitudinal study which we are carrying out is not yet finished. At the end we will have data of five points of measurement covering four years of moral development. Therefore at the moment we have to be very careful and cautious in interpreting the findings presented above. Nevertheless, some viewpoints may be of interest and seem to be suggested by our data.

(1) Kohlberg's hypothesis that an individual firmly established on a given stage will judge all moral conflicts according to the principle of this stage can perhaps not be upheld. As already suspected in other studies (cf. Beck 1996), people seem to distinguish between various types of problems or situations when they look for moral reasons for the decisions they prefer. The idea of a „structural whole" (Colby/Kohlberg 1978, 7) may not work in the way Kohlberg and his associates believe. At least during and immediately after the status passage from school to work the moral judgment competence of our apprentices was subject to a process of differentiation including not only steps of progress (for the market story 11 of 28 persons, for the team story 8 of 33) but also steps of regression (market story 5 of 28, team story 8 of 33). In two cases we even found that the judgments for the market story went up from stage 2 to 3 whereas the judgments for the team story went down from stage 2 to 1 - a spreading effect in moral development. Of course, we will ex-

amine these results intensively. Our program includes also face to face moral judgment interviews which we will have to analyse very carefully under this aspect.

(2) It is not at all clear what's going on during the first year of apprenticeship with respect to the moral judgment of the two types of situations. We would have expected that the young people learn to differentiate these two types in a way that is functional in terms of economy. But what we have learned from our data is (a) that looking at the group as a whole the development doesn't follow a clear direction, (b) that in a *market situation* two thirds of our apprentices after one year in vocational training activate inadequate sociocentric reflections whereas (c) after the same time about four fifth of them look at *team problems* under a dysfunctional strategic aspect. These findings are not only of interest for the investigation of moral development but also for the question of reaching the objectives of vocational education. We are not sure but it might have been of some influence that in our country (Germany) the problem of youth unemployment has been growing within the last years and that therefore the aspect of competition for a job has become more important than the question of good human relations and cooperative or team spirit in companies.

(3) As to the conditions of moral development the data presented above are highly aggregated. Therefore they are not yet apt to draw safe conclusions on their theoretical and practical quality. On the other hand, it seems that they might contain differential information on moral relevant features of social interactions and ascriptions.

We have not only got data about the moral atmosphere in companies but also in vocational schools, in families, and peergroups. And we are gathering this information along a time span of four years. So, we will be able to compute a more complex model for the analysis of the process of moral development. Again, we shall then have to put the question

whether Kohlberg's idea of a „structured whole" (Colby/Kohlberg 1987, 6-9) will fit with our data. At the present stage of investigation we have doubts that this will be the case.

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